



The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

HELP

The United Kingdom is situated to the northwest of the European continent, between the Atlantic Ocean and the North Sea. It has a total land area of 243,600 km². The United Kingdom is made up of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The United Kingdom (UK) was formed on January 1, 1801 and constitutes the greater part of the British Isles. The British Isles is a geographical term for two large islands, Great Britain and Ireland, and a great number of smaller islands, including the Isle of Man, Orkney, the Shetlands and the Isle of Wight.

Government

The United Kingdom is a constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy with a monarch, currently Queen Elizabeth II, and a parliament with two houses: The House of Lords, with 588 life peers (their titles cannot be inherited), 92 hereditary peers (their titles can be inherited by their children), and 26 bishops; and the House of Commons, which has 646 elected members. The main function of the House of Lords is to make and revise laws and to check the work of the government.

Members of Parliament (MPs) represent their interests in the House of Commons. They work in Parliament and for their political party. Some MPs from the ruling party become ministers. Parliament sits for five years unless it is dissolved sooner. There are two main political parties in the United Kingdom: the Conservative Party, which is traditionally centre-right, and the Labour Party, traditionally more left-wing. The third largest party is the Liberal Democrats.

The executive power of the Crown is exercised by the cabinet, headed by the Prime Minister, currently Gordon Brown (Labour).

Recently, there has been a process called devolution. This means that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland now have their own parliaments.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland lies in the northeast of the island of Ireland. In 1801, the whole of Ireland was incorporated into the United Kingdom. After years of civil war, Ireland became a republic in 1921. At this time, Britain negotiated with Ireland to keep the six counties in the northeast of Ireland. These six counties now make up what is known as Northern Ireland. The southern part of the island is the Republic of Ireland. The famous writer C.S. Lewis is from Northern Ireland.



The Giant's Causeway

An unusual natural geological feature that was formed as lava from an ancient volcano cooled on the earth's surface. It consists of over 40,000 massive black columns. In Irish mythology, it was built by a giant to cross the sea to Scotland.

Belfast

The capital and the largest city in Northern Ireland. Originally it was a centre of ship-building. It is where the *Titanic* was built. For years, the city suffered from clashes between Irish nationalists and supporters of the union with Britain. On April 10, 1998, the Good Friday Agreement was signed here by the British and Irish governments. It was a major political development in the Northern Irish peace process.



WALES

Wales (Cymru in Welsh) is a mountainous country on the western side of Great Britain. Wales has not been politically independent since 1282, when it was conquered by English King Edward I. It is a principality, ruled by a prince. Traditionally, the title of the Prince of Wales is given to the oldest son of the reigning English monarch. The national game of Wales is rugby. Famous Welshmen include actors Richard Burton, Sir Anthony Hopkins and Catherine Zeta Jones, and writers Roald Dahl and Dick Francis, and playwright and poet Dylan Thomas. The patron saint of Wales is St David.



Cardiff

The capital city of Wales since 1955. Cardiff has many landmark buildings such as the Millennium Stadium (opened in 1999, it is the second largest stadium in the world) and Cardiff Castle (a medieval castle transformed from a Norman stronghold).



SCOTLAND



Scotland is a mountainous country in the north of Great Britain, famous for its freshwater lochs (lakes). The largest one is Loch Lomond, which is 40 km long. Famous people from Scotland include writers Walter Scott, R. L. Stevenson, A. C. Doyle and actors Sean Connery and Ewan McGregor. St Andrew is the patron saint of Scotland.

The Scottish Highlands

A mountainous area in Scotland including the highest mountain in the UK, Ben Nevis (1,343 m). There are also popular ski resorts such as the Glenshee Ski Centre. The famous Highland Games, with bagpipes, dancing, and heavy athletics, are held each year to celebrate Scottish and Celtic culture, especially in the Scottish Highlands.



Edinburgh

The capital city of Scotland is known for the annual Edinburgh Festival, a collection of festivals held over about four weeks from early August. Among the notable places in Edinburgh are Edinburgh Castle, which dominates the skyline of the city, and Holyroodhouse, the Queen's official residence while in Scotland.



ENGLAND

England makes up the southern part of Great Britain. Nearly 84% of the population of the UK lives in England. England is only 35 km away from France, linked by a tunnel under the English Channel. The patron saint of England is St George.

Oxford

England is famous for its educational institutions. The oldest university in the English-speaking world is in Oxford, with evidence of teaching which goes back to the 11th century. The University of Oxford is made up of 38 colleges. Other famous academic institutions include the University of Cambridge, which celebrated 800 years of history in 2009, and the University of London.



Windsor

Windsor is a town in South East England, best known as the site of Windsor Castle, the official residence of the Queen and the largest and oldest continually occupied castle in the world. In the borough, you can also find Eton College, Ascot Racecourse and Legoland.



London

The capital city of the United Kingdom, a major financial, political, cultural, educational and fashion centre. Central London is full of places of interest, historical buildings, museums and galleries. Many tourists come to London to visit places connected with the royal family, such as Buckingham Palace, the Tower of London and Kensington Palace.

